

At the beginning of this week's *Parashah*, Yaakov prepares to meet Esav for the first time since Esav made up his mind to kill Yaakov. Yaakov hears that Esav is marching toward him with an army of 400 men, and "Yaakov became very frightened" (32:8). Why was Yaakov frightened? Did he not have *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*, Who had promised to protect him? Was Yaakov's fear a sin? Many of the classical commentaries--including *Rashi*, *Rambam*, *Ramban*, and *Ibn Ezra*, among others--discuss these questions.

R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (1437-1508; Portugal, Spain and Italy) writes: Yaakov's fear of Esav was not due to a weakness in his *Emunah* / faith or his *Bitachon*. Yaakov's fear was like the feeling a brave warrior has before going into battle--he recognizes the reality that he may be killed, but he forges ahead anyway. If one goes into war thinking there is no danger, we would not call him brave! Where is his bravery, if he is oblivious to the danger he is in? If a person does not know the value of money or is so wealthy that money is meaningless to him, would we praise him for his charity? Only one who understands what he is giving up is praiseworthy!

Likewise, continues R' Abarbanel, Yaakov's *Bitachon* was meaningful only because he was afraid of Esav. Had Yaakov not understood what he was up against, his *Bitachon* would have been worthless. Clearly, Yaakov did trust in *Hashem*, for there were many ways he could have saved himself--fleeing, sending a messenger to their father Yitzchak asking him to intervene, etc.--but Yaakov did not do any of those things. Our Sages teach that a Jew should not say, "I hate non-kosher food." Rather, he should say, "It looks delicious, but the Torah prohibited it to me!" Similarly, writes R' Abarbanel, a person should not say, "I am not afraid!" Rather, he should acknowledge his fear, and then he should place his trust in *Hashem*. (*Peirush Al Ha'Torah*)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers.

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (Spain; early 11th century) writes: "Know, my brother, that our goal when praying is for our soul to pine for *Elokim* and to humble itself before Him, at the same time that we elevate Him through our praises and thanksgiving, and place all of our burdens upon Him." (*Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Cheshbon Ha'Nefesh* 3:9)

Rabbeinu Bachya writes further: A certain *Tzaddik* used to say after his prayers, "... You [G-d] know what I need and how to save me from harm. I did not tell You my needs in order to bring them to Your attention; rather, I did so in order to recognize what I am lacking so that I may place my trust in You. If, in my foolishness, I ask for something that is not in my best interests, or I ask for something that is not what I need -- Your choice is better than my choice! I leave everything to Your decree, as King David said (*Tehilim* 131:1-2), 'My Master! My heart is not proud nor my look haughty; I do not aspire to great things or to what is beyond me. I have taught myself to be contented like a child nursing from its mother; like a nursing child am I in my mind'." (*Ibid* 3:18)

R' Yehuda Meir Dvir *shlita* (Yerushalayim) explains: Rabbeinu Bachya is teaching that the purpose of spelling out our needs in our prayers is not in order to have those needs fulfilled. [In any event, G-d knows what we need better than we know it.] True, we phrase our prayers as requests, and a consequence of our prayers may be that our needs are fulfilled. However, the ultimate goal of prayer is not to get what we need; it is to internalize how much we need *Hashem* in order to obtain our needs.

To be clear, R' Dvir continues, it is essential to accomplishing this goal that we make requests from *Hashem* and place our burdens on Him--the more, the better. The more needy we feel, the more meaningful our *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem* will be.

(*Bet Lechem Yehuda: Haskel Ve'ya'doa* p.69)

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“I have become small as a result of all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done Your servant.” (32:11)

The *Midrash Tanna D’vei Elyahu Zuta* (1:5) teaches: Yaakov is to be praised especially for his *Tzedakah* / acts of charity, as it is written, “I have become small.” This refers to *Tzedakah*, as it is written (*Mishlei* 16:8), “Better a little *Tzedakah* . . .” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Chaim Abulafia *z”l* (1669-1744; *Eretz Yisrael* and Izmir, Turkey) writes in the name of R’ Y. Chabiliv *z”l* (referred to by those who quote him as the “*Chassid*” / “pious one” and “*Kadosh*” / “holy one”; possibly a reference to a 17th century rabbi of Chevron by that name): What led the *Midrash* to conclude that our verse refers to Yaakov’s giving *Tzedakah*? Seemingly, Yaakov is saying the opposite: I have insufficient merits with which to deserve Your kindness!

R’ Chabiliv answers: The *Arizal* teaches that one should not put himself down or minimize his own good deeds in a time of danger. Consistent with this, the author of the *Midrash* was bothered by Yaakov’s seeming to minimize his own merits. Therefore, the *Midrash* reinterpreted the verse as extolling Yaakov’s merits. (Etz Ha’Chaim: *Parashat Vayakhel*)

R’ Chaim Yosef David Azulai *z”l* (1724-1806; lived in *Eretz Yisrael* and Italy, but traveled throughout Europe and North Africa; known as “*Chida*”) adds: Nevertheless, Yaakov did not want to appear to have served *Hashem* for the sake of receiving reward. Therefore, he used an ambiguous expression that both alluded to the diminishment of his merits because of G-d’s kindness and alluded to his performing the *Mitzvah* of *Tzedakah*. (Pnei David, quoted in *Otzrot Ha’Chida*)

“He said to him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘Yaakov.’” (32:28)

R’ Naftali Hertz Weisel *z”l* (1725-1805; German banker, and prolific author of works of Torah commentary, Hebrew grammar, and *Mussar*) writes: Surely the angel knew Yaakov’s name! Rather, this verse should be understood like the verse (*Shmot* 4:2), “*Hashem* said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ and he said, ‘A staff.’” Obviously, *Hashem* knew that Moshe was holding a staff. *Hashem* meant, “How do you perceive that thing in your hand?” to which Moshe answered, “I perceive it to be a staff.” “No!” replied *Hashem*, “it is a snake!” Here, likewise, the angel was asking, “What spiritual powers do you perceive in yourself?” to which our patriarch answered, “The spiritual powers of Yaakov,” a name that represents humility. “No!” replied the angel, “You have the much greater spiritual powers represented by the name ‘Yisrael,’ meaning, ‘You have wrestled with the Divine and with man and have overcome!’” (Imrei Shefer)

“He charged them, saying, ‘So shall you say: To my lord, to Esav, so said your servant Yaakov--I have sojourned / “Garti” with Lavan and have lingered until now’.” (32:5)

Rashi z”l writes: The word “*Garti*” (גרתי) has the numerical value of “*Taryag*” (תרי"ג) *Mitzvot* / the 613 Commandments. Yaakov is saying: I kept them all and learned none of Lavan’s evil ways. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yonoson David *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Pachad Yitzchak in Yerushalayim) asks: Presumably, Yaakov meant to say that he prevailed over Lavan in the merit of his *Mitzvah* observance, and he likewise would prevail over Esav in that merit. But, why did he mention that there are 613 *Mitzvot*?

R’ David explains: There is a fundamental difference between Lavan’s and the Torah’s respective world-views. At the end of last week’s *Parashah*, after Yaakov’s eloquent defense of his decision to run away, Lavan replies (31:43), “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flock is my flock, and all that you see is mine.” Lavan meant: “Nothing you said made any impression on me. I, Lavan, do not believe any order exists in this world; it is a free-for-all, where everything is mine if I say so. Certainly, I do not believe in right or wrong.” This, writes R’ David, explains why the Torah records (24:50): “Lavan and Betuel answered . . .” The Torah is teaching that Lavan spoke before his father because, in Lavan’s world, there is no order.

In contrast, R’ David continues, the Torah tells us that Rivka--Lavan’s sister and Yaakov’s mother--was an orderly person. When Avraham’s slave asked her two questions at once, she answered the first question first and the second question second (see *Rashi* to 24:24). The contrast between Lavan and Rivka is not just a difference in manners; it is fundamental to the mission of which Rivka was to become a part--to establish twelve holy tribes that would implement *Hashem*’s order in the world. The fact that there are exactly 613 *Mitzvot* is not random; it is “orderly,” paralleling the 613 parts of the human body (see *Makkot* 23b). [Thus, by telling Esav that he kept the 613 *Mitzvot*, Yaakov was conveying that he expects to be safe from Esav because he is in the midst of accomplishing the holy mission assigned to him.]

R’ David adds: In this light, we can better understand why the Sages instruct us to recite the third *Parashah* / passage of *Shema* (i.e., the *Parashah* of *Tzitzit*) daily. The *Mishnah* (*Berachot* 2:2) teaches that we accept the yoke of *Mitzvot* in the second *Parashah* of *Shema* (“*Ve’hayah Im Shamo’a*”). What, then, is added by the third *Parashah*, which also seems to be about the *Mitzvot*--saying, for example: “It shall constitute *Tzitzit* for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of *Hashem* and perform them”? R’ David explains: *Ve’hayah Im Shamo’a* refers to *Mitzvot* generally, whereas the third *Parashah* actually alludes to the existence of 613 *Mitzvot* (see *Rashi* to *Bemidbar* 15:39). As explained, that number reflects that the *Mitzvot* are not a random collection of commandments; there is order to them.

(Kuntreis *Sukkot* 70)